City of Austin

P.O. Box 1088, Austin, TX, 78767

Memo

AUSTINCODE
DEPARTMENT

To:	Mayor and Council
From:	Carl Smart, Director, Austin Code Department (ACD)
Date:	June 10, 2015
Subject:	Abandoned Buildings in Austin

The Austin Code Department has initiated a program to identify and monitor abandoned structures in the City of Austin. The program's primary objective is to ensure that all abandoned structures are maintained to meet the City's minimum safety standards, and to ensure that these structures do not threaten the well-being and quality of life of Austin residents.

Abandoned buildings pose many hazards to neighborhoods. Structures which are left vacant for long periods of time present an injury risk to anyone who enters, and also invite illegal activity and occupants. Studies have shown that abandoned buildings are more prone to fires than occupied buildings, and that fires initiated in abandoned buildings are more likely to spread to surrounding properties. Abandoned buildings also contribute to urban blight; community groups frequently cite unsanitary and unsightly buildings as a central issue of concern in their neighborhoods.

The Code Department began a preliminary identification phase in November 2014, during which Code Officers reviewed case histories and inspected more than 500 properties with potentially abandoned structures. Working with the Fire Department's Chief Safety Officer, as well as the Support, Abatement, Forfeiture, and Enforcement (SAFE) Team, Code Officers identified 127 abandoned structures within Austin's full-purpose jurisdictional boundaries. Of the 127 abandoned structures, Code Officers confirmed that 45 of the properties had at least one active code violation case, and an additional 34 new violation cases were created.

The program is now into the monitoring phase, during which Austin Code Officers conduct quarterly follow-up inspections of all known abandoned structures. At the time of inspection, Code Officers will verify that each structure remains properly boarded and secured, and ensure that any dangerous or substandard structural conditions are addressed through every possible enforcement channel. In partnership with the Austin Fire Department, the program also leverages web-based geographic information systems (GIS) to enable multiple City departments to report

the condition of and identify new abandoned structures. Program updates will be distributed to public safety departments through the bi-monthly meeting of the SAFE Team.

For further information about the program, please contact me at 512.974.1970 or via email at carl.smart@austintexas.gov .

c: Marc Ott, City Manager
        Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager